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Power, Discursive Practices and the Construction of the “Real”

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Abstract: Starting with a critique of the epistemological and ontological bases of neo-institutionalism, in this article we defend the potential for the application of post-structuralist perspectives to the institutional approach. We contend that this theoretical approach, which incorporates an element, traditionally overlooked in institutional analyses, namely power, has the advantage of contributing to an enhanced comprehension of the dynamics of institutionalization. We apply post-structural perspectives, particularly as presented by Michel Foucault, as well as the pragmatic perspectives represented by the works of William James and Richard Rorty, to explicating underpinnings of the institutional approach. We would stress that the affinity between the post-structural perspective and pragmatism has been acknowledged by other authors, such as Keller (1995), McSwite (1997) and Rorty (1999) himself. Incorporating the element of power into the analysis contributes to an enhanced comprehension of the dynamics of institutionalization. In conclusion, we believe that the area of organizational studies would benefit by a more all-encompassing vision of the processes of institutionalization, which would include power at its core, instead of considering institutions as non-changing variables. Clegg (1989) has provided a framework for such analysis and this paper serves to elaborate what some of its philosophical foundations might be in greater detail. We would stress that it is not possible to find answers if we just search for cause-effect relations, because the explanations found through causal mechanisms constitutes, in itself, a kind of discourse of power, as pointed out by moderns such as Hobbes (1650). Undoubtedly, if we take empirical research into consideration, what we need is, from a historical perspective, understand the way by which the main discourses or narratives constitute, transform and are transformed by our objects of investigation, among which organizations certainly occupy a central place. However, it is necessary to tackle this undertaking with a certain degree of humility, abandoning the search for ultimate causes to more proximate and local narratives, small stories that communicate their own sense of the mechanisms of truth at work. And in these matters, we should be bullied into causality.

Keywords: power, discursive practices, institutionalization, post-structuralism, fields, construction of the “real”

1. Introduction

The new institutionalism is a currently fashionable trend not only in the area of organizational studies, but also in areas such as public administration, sociology and economics, as well as in cultural studies. To a certain extent, this approach is contrary to the basic presuppositions of the rational school, the empiricist epistemology of economicism, as well as structural functionalism (McSwite, 1998). This fact alone may explain part of the positive receptivity to institutionalism in the field of social sciences: being positioned as an alternative to the predominant orthodoxy.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to grasp the paradigmatic presuppositions of the institutional approach, which is characterized by the lack of a coherent account of the bases for human action in organizations. Powell and DiMaggio (1990) acknowledge this failing and stress that, in this sense, the new institutional thinking could benefit from interpretive approaches, such as the social constructivism of Berger and Luckmann, the ethnomethodology of Garfinkel, the phenomenology of Schutz, the cognitivism of Simon, or even the works of Bourdieu and Giddens.

Without these foundations, it is difficult to view the institutional perspective as capable of consolidating the theoretical agenda or of being an alternative for research to the dominant perspectives in the field of organizational studies.

In this paper, we apply post-structural perspectives, particularly as presented by Michel Foucault, as well as the pragmatic perspectives represented by the works of William James and Richard Rorty, to explicating underpinnings of the institutional approach. We would stress that the affinity between the

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377

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post-structural perspective and pragmatism has been acknowledged by other authors, such as Keller (1995), McSwite (1997) and Rorty (1999) himself. Moreover, we affirm that the incorporation of "power" into the analysis, contributes to an enhanced comprehension of the dynamics of institutionalization.

2. "Official" perspectives at the basis of the new institutionalism: social constructivism and ethnomethodology

Neo-institutionalists criticize the Parsonian view of the social system as normative order, for focusing on the value aspects and excluding the cognitive, cultural and action oriented aspects. For Parsons (Heritage, 1984), the value system is an important factor that contributes to the understanding of organization and social order. This normative order replicates itself by means of the appropriation of the identity of the individuals involved, turning them into role players who operate on the basis of internalized values which they have been socialized into enacting. Action is analyzed as the product of causal processes, which, despite operating in the "mind of the players", are considered inaccessible and uncontrollable by them.

The main criticism that new institutionalism levels at Parsonian functionalism relates to the lack of a cognitive dimension which, according to the representatives of this approach, may be found in the works of March and Cyert (1963), March and Simon (1958) and Simon (1976). The decision-making process within organizations is seen as a shift from the old to the new institutionalism, from a normative approach to a cognitive approach, from commitment to routine, from motivation to merely playing by the rules (Heritage, 1984; McSwite, 1998; Powell & DiMaggio, 1990).

Other paradigms assume a central role in the new institutional approach, among which social constructivism stands out. The main representatives of this approach are Berger and Luckmann (2001) who are interested in the "genetics" of truth taken as reality (Canales, 1996) and examine the processes of the social construction of reality by contending that the central sociological question is to discover how subjective significances become objective realities.. According to Berger & Luckmann (2001) the relationship between the person – as producer – and the social world – produced by such people – is, and continues to be, a dialectical relationship. In other words, the person (as an actor in a collectivity) and the social world act on one another in a reciprocal manner. The product fights back against the producer. Exteriorization and reification are stages of a continual dialectical process, accompanied by interiorization, whereby the objective social world is reintroduced into consciousness during the process of socialization. What was "constructed as reality" – constructed by the social intersubjective *per se* – manifests itself simply as "reality". What is taken for granted as reality and the fact of superseding it are registered beyond the directly observable or discussable by those involved, who, after instituting it, proceed to live the reality now attributed with full legitimacy. Once reified, socially produced reality needs to be covered with a second cloak of truth. Legitimations – right from the affirmation of the truth of a maxim to full-scale reports which contain symbolic universes (religious, political, etc.), come to represent a "second level" treatise, which qualifies the reality as "fair" or "good" (Canales, 1996).

Consequently, we may note the following process: *exteriorization*, which sees society as a human product; *reification*, seeing society as an objective reality, and *interiorization*, by which the person is seen as a social product (Berger & Luckmann, 2001:87).

According to Canales (1996), knowledge is not only the object of study for social constructivism, defined by Berger & Luckmann (2001) as the sociology of common knowledge, but also for ethnomethodology, defined by Garfinkel (1967) as the method for common knowledge. Ethnomethodology analyses the practical knowledge of everyday life, the folk-methods that generate "the reality" which we consider given and obvious; the formal processes by means of which the ordinary actor "grasps" action in the context within which it is inserted. During the action, the actor takes as given certain knowledge considered as being likewise known and manipulated by the others. This basis of common knowledge – activated in each social situation – as well as its rules and operations, are objects of ethnomethodological research. 'Ethno', in view of the fact that we are speaking about knowledge specific to the society of reference of the actor; and 'methodology', considering that we are talking about formal procedures of knowledge and argumentation manipulated by the ordinary actor. For Garfinkel (1967), a student of Parsons who came to criticize the master, the social order is constituted as a practical activity during the course of daily interaction and does not derive automatically from shared standards of value and social roles. He rejects the

view that the common judgments of social actors may be treated as irrelevant in the analysis of action and social organization.

"It is the Parsonian disregard for the entire common-sense world in which ordinary actors choose courses of action on the basis of detailed practical considerations and judgments which are intelligible and accountable to others, which ultimately constitutes the central focus and point of departure for Garfinkel's treatment of the theory of action" (Heritage, 1984:34).

In intersubjective engagements, by means of conversations, participants use tacit knowledge, cognitive typifications that Garfinkel (1967) refers to as "socially-sanctioned-facts-of-life-in-society-that-any-bona-fide-member-of-the-society-knows". Such conversations are maintained despite the inherent indexicality of language, through the ability that the participants possess for relating talk to some external knowledge that renders it comprehensible (Powell & DiMaggio, 1990:20). Garfinkel (1967) shifted the image of cognition from a rational, quasi-scientific process (in Parsons) to one that operates largely beneath the level of consciousness, a routine and conventional "practical reason" governed by "rules" that are recognized only when they are breached. For him, action is largely scripted and *justified*, after the fact, by reference to a stock of culturally available *legitimizing* "accounts" (Powell & DiMaggio, 1990).

3. The contributions of post-structural and pragmatic perspectives

It is our opinion that the main difference between the approaches which analyze the processes involved in the construction of reality lie in the basic presuppositions about the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy, analyzed from a realistic or idealistic perspective. Both Marxist concepts, such as *social production* and *social construction* relate to the processes of reification. When analyzed from the standpoint of the notion of fetishism and scientific facts "a complex variety of processes comes into play whereby participants forget that what is "out there" is the product of their own "alienated" work". It is worth remembering here that both words, namely fact and fetish, share a common etymological origin (adapted from Barthes, in Latour and Woolgar, 1986:259). Berger and Pullberg (1966) was well aware of these similarities, as his article on 'reification and the critique of consciousness', attests. However, from the Marxist point of view, the reification process is related to production starting from material and objective conditions (which are "taken for granted" in the capitalist structure) and according to Berger and Luckmann (2001), reification is a subjective process of construction. Such a division reveals an objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy, deeply rooted in our common feelings about the world. In this respect, the contribution of pragmatism is extremely important. Authors like Richard Rorty explicitly propose the end of this dichotomy, as do the French post-structuralists, especially Foucault.

For many people, objectivity is the natural attitude of man vis-à-vis the world. Man is born in a real world. As Morente (1930) argues, for the realist there exist things, the world of things and the I that stands between them. Knowledge reflects the selfsame reality. Truth is defined as the conciliation between the thought and the thing. Such conciliation can be achieved by straightforward formation of concepts. Evolution and the process of realistic thinking involve a continuous correction of concepts. In the essence of this whole process, we always find the same fundamental precept, namely "that things are intelligible: that things are that which have in their very being the essence, which is accessible to thought, because thinking adjusts itself and coincides with them" (Morente, 1930: 134). In other words, realists believe that there exists one, and only one, *way the world is in itself* (Rorty, 1999a). Realism is not contingent upon ones knowledge.

Such thinking originated with Parmenides and came to fruition with Aristotle and today demarcates realism (for which Bhaskar 1975 remains foundational), which attempts to reproduce faithfully the very articulation of reality.

"(...) spontaneous and natural man is Aristotelian; and if Man is spontaneously and naturally Aristotelian we should not be surprised at the spectacle afforded to us by History, which consists in the fact that, since Aristotle, the Aristotelian metaphysical conception of the world and of life has gradually become increasingly ingrained in both spirit and soul until it has become a belief; a belief that reaches the very essence of intellect, the very essence of the individual soul" (Morente, 1930:135).

Realism is bound to take stock when confronted with the existence of historical facts, which gives rise to a new philosophical position that considers that human thought is radically and essentially conditioned by time and by history (Morente, 1930). It is a philosophical position, known as idealism, which "turns its back on common sense; turns its back on its natural propensity and invites us to conduct an extremely difficult acrobatic exercise, which consists in seeing things as being derived from the self" (Morente, 1930:141). Now is neither the time, nor this essay the place, to give historical explanation of the evolution of this new philosophical thinking. Suffice it to emphasize that the two currents of thought, which originate from different precepts, still engage the thoughts of students and researchers, be they from organizations or not. They have generated countless perspectives, which today still compete for the status of "superiority" in methodological terms.

The structuration theory of Giddens and the *habitus* construct of Bourdieu both attempt to offer a theoretical synthesis of the objectivity-subjectivity debate (Peci, 2003). Pragmatist authors, however, rather than synthesize the questionable (subjectivism) with the impossible (objectivism) consider that the realism-antirealism debate should be left to one side. A perspective that did not acknowledge this dichotomy would have the advantage of liberating us from the object-subject and appearance-reality problems which have dominated philosophy since Descartes (Rorty, 1999). Additionally, it undercuts other dichotomies: words-acts, knowledge-action, theory-practice, and space-time – these all lose their *raison d'être*. Pragmatism emerged mainly in the work of William James, as a philosophical temperament, a theory of truth, a theory of significance, a holistic account of knowledge and a method for the resolution of philosophical disputes. Obviously, all these aspects are closely interrelated. However, as a method, pragmatism attempts mainly to resolve metaphysical disputes, attempting to interpret each concept in terms of its respective practical consequences (James, 1997).

Pragmatism shares a similar view of truth to post-structuralism. For James (1997), truth is a construct – an established truth. No transcendental principle, no absolute truth, no permanent concept or (pre)conception may guide the pragmatic individual, thus establishing an ambitious political program. The pragmatic vision of truth is the truth that is good for us to believe in (James, 1997 and Rorty, 1991). Rorty (1991) emphasizes the ethical preoccupations of pragmatism, expressed in the "us" underlined in the quote from James. He argues that:

"the pragmatist does not have a theory of truth, much less a relativistic one. As a partisan of solidarity, his account of the value of cooperative human inquiry has only an ethical base, not an epistemological or metaphysical one" (Rorty, 1991:24).

But, William James was also a psychologist. He acknowledged that old truths continue to be part of personal beliefs, even when new *beliefs* are added to our wealth of experience. "The new contents themselves are not true, they simply *come* and *are*" (James, 1997:100). The truth of an idea signifies its becoming true, to the extent that this idea helps us to assume a satisfactory relationship with other parts of our experience. An idea is true instrumentally. The truth of ideas signifies their power to "work". Instead of a succession of ideas, James finds a flow, a current, the waters of which merge. The position in the current makes each situation unique.

Rorty (1991) introduces the question of justification to pragmatic discussion. For the pragmatic individual, justification is what substitutes the criterion of truth, which is characteristic of objectivism. Justifications are constructed in relation to their practical advantages and based on experience. Consequently, justifications may also be deconstructed based on the same practical advantages. Rorty seems to share the same point of view of social constructivism, in which "we are just the historical moment that we are, not representatives of something ahistorical" (Rorty, 1991:30). For pragmatism, reality simply signifies the relationship of things with our emotional and active life. Everything which stimulates our interest is real. Being the good pragmatic that he is, Rorty criticizes objectivism in terms of practical consequences: "The best argument that we partisans of solidarity have against the realistic partisans of objectivity is Nietzsche's argument that the traditional Western metaphysic-epistemological way of firming up our habits isn't working anymore" (Rorty, 1991:33). He also attempts to show that there are sentiments relative to the desire for subjectivity: fear of death, the attempt to avoid facing contingent fact, and escaping time and chance.

To be pragmatic is to take a stance with relation to life. Rorty (1991) suggests that pragmatism concerns itself with "us", with solidarity. The "us" has two components, namely the I and the other(s),

but it also implies a relationship between these components. We tackle this object mainly as a relationship by means of which the two parts may be (trans)formed.

Although not so often remarked, Foucault's concept of discourse – a "unit" of knowledge present at a particular period in time – is based on the same ontological presupposition as pragmatism, specifically with respect to the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) distances himself from an objectivist and/or subjectivist positioning in discourse. In the study of discursive processes, Foucault (1972:63) proposes "avoiding 'things'", suppressing the moment of "things themselves", albeit without resorting to the linguistic analysis of significance. In a Foucauldian analysis "words are as deliberately absent as the things themselves" (Foucault, 1972:63-4).

" (...) 'discourses', in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words; (...) analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. (...) A task that consists of not - of no longer treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972:64).

Many other examples, which do not acknowledge the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy, are present in the work of Foucault, demonstrating his affinity with the pragmatism. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this work we will concentrate here on the concept of discourse. Foucault (1972) uses the concept of discourse to refer to relations, which favor the process of the formation of objects. He studies the process of discursive formation, defined on the basis of a set of relations, attempting to show that any object of the discourse in question finds its place, its law of appearance.

"These relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterisation; and these relations are not present in the object; it is not they that are deployed when the object is being analyzed; they do not indicate the web, the immanent rationality, that ideal nervure that reappears totally or in part when one conceives of the object in the truth of its concept. They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority" (Foucault, 1972:59-60)

Therefore, discursive relations are not inherent in the discourse though neither are they exterior relations, which would limit them or would impose certain forms, or would force them in certain circumstances to say certain things. They are, to a certain extent, the limit of the discourse and characterize the discourse as a practice. The discourse should be considered a practice that systematically forms the objects which are being talked about. The set of rules imminent to a practice define its specific nature. Hence the current use of the concept of discursive practices in research influenced by the Foucauldian perspective is a case of tautology. The word discourse per se already includes the dimension of practice.

To seek for the unity of a discourse is a quest for dispersion of elements, described in its singularity of establishing specific rules according to which objects, enunciations, concepts, and theoretical options were formed. The unity of the discourse lies in this system, which controls and allows its formation. When we speak of a system of formation, this not only includes the juxtaposition, the coexistence or interaction of heterogeneous elements (institutions, techniques, social groups, perceptive organizations, relations between sundry discourses) but also its relationship through discursive practice (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault incorporates the dimension of power in his analysis, basing his work on Nietzsche and using an approach similar to that which pragmatism developed, spoke of the politics of truth. He argued that knowledge was invented, that is that it has no origin.

"knowledge is simply the outcome of the interplay, the encounter, the junction, the struggle, and the compromise between the instincts. Something it's produced because

the instincts meet, fight one another, and at the end of their battles finally reach a compromise. That something is knowledge" (Foucault, 1994:8).

Just as knowledge is in no way related to nature and is not derived from human nature, it is also not related to the world to be known, has no affinity with this world to be known, or with things. The world does not attempt to imitate man; the world knows no laws. It is here that we find the first rupture between knowledge and things. Thus, if we really want to know what knowledge is and understand its very essence and its production, we should turn to politics rather than to philosophy. We can discover what knowledge is by examining the relations between struggle and power, the way in which people and things hate each other, fight and strive to dominate each other, and exercise power relationships over one another. Since pure knowledge per se does not exist, we should attempt to understand the politics of truth.

Foucault (1972) seeks to differentiate between the concept of discourse and the Marxist concept of ideology. For him, the relations between power and knowledge are inseparable, because within any society exists a "regime of truth" with its particular mechanisms for the production of truth. He describes contemporary societies as having a "'political economy' of truth" characterized by five traits:

- "Truth" is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it
- It subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power)
- It is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations)
- It is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media)
- It is the issue of a whole political debate and social-confrontation ("ideological" struggles) (Diamond & Quinby, 1988).

The discursive field, wherein the time-space dimension is appraised, is another important concept for Foucault. The field is the space in which discursive happenings are situated. It is in the field that the questions of the human being, consciousness, and the subject, manifest themselves, cross over, become embroiled, and define themselves (Foucault, 1972: 25). Temporality and spatiality become one in the concept of field. The field is time and space, being and becoming, structure and history, formation and (trans)formation.

In this article, we set out to include in the scope of the institutional perspective the idea of the discursive field, instead of the matrix or network, normally present as the *locus* (considered also in its temporal dimension) and form of movement of the actors in the institutional perspective. It is in discursive fields that the processes of reification and institutionalization occur. The process of discursive formation (trans)forms objects. By relating the processes of institutionalization with discourse, we open up possibilities for the incorporation of a neglected dimension of institutional analysis: the dimension of power. We further argue that by incorporating this dimension, we can take a step forward in comprehending the processes of institutional "selection", or simply answer the question "Which practices become institutionalized and why these and not others?" This is an important point for understanding the very configuration of an already institutionalized field. Understanding the struggles that took place during the process of formation of a field, based on a historical analysis such as those of Vieira, Carvalho and Silva (2009) can help to identify the main explanatory features of its current configuration. For us, these elements are discursive elements, or discourses, which represent different powers. Our approach is anticipated in Clegg (1989), in the notion of power flowing through those passage points that actors in a field, constantly changing as a result of exogenous contingencies as well as endogenous struggles with meaning and its circuitry, seek to stabilize as their meaning serving their construction of their power.

As in the pragmatic approach, Foucault stresses the role of knowledge as being useful and necessary to the exercise of power, seeing as it is useful in practice and not because it is false – as the Marxist tradition has attempted to prove. For Gordon (1999:xviii), one of the key aspects of Foucault is that he stresses that what is most interesting in the relationship between power and knowledge is not the

detection of false and spurious knowledge – rather that the role of knowledge is valued and effective due to its guaranteed instrumental efficacy. Foucault uses the word *savoir* to denote knowledge akin to *know-how* (a way of making a problem tractable or a material safe to handle). This “average” type of knowledge, which cannot be rigorously scientific, requires a considerable degree of ratification within a social group and grants some social benefits.

The idea of the instrumentality of truth, i.e. of knowledge, present in James (1997), is highly similar to the interest of Foucault in the role of knowledge as useful and necessary to the exercise of power, because it is practically serviceable and not because it is false, as the Marxist tradition has attempted to show. However, unlike Foucault, for James the focus of the analysis continues to be the subject. Foucault develops the concept beyond the subject to the level of discourse. Undoubtedly, this notion of practicability, which is present in Foucault, has the advantage of offering another dimension for the analysis of the formation of discursive fields, namely the dimension of power which is, indeed, not explicitly acknowledged in the pragmatic approach either.

For Foucault, power is not capable of promoting and exploring spurious knowledge, though the rational exercise of power tends to make full use of the knowledge capable of maximum instrumental efficacy. Thus, two ideas which were present in the investigations of Foucault were the productivity of power (power relationships are integral to the modern apparatus of social production and related to active programs for the fabricated parts of the collective substance of society itself) and the constitution of subjectivity by means of power relationships (the individual impact of power relationships is not limited to pure repression, but also includes the intention of teaching and molding conduct, and gradually introducing forms of self awareness and identity) (Gordon, 1994).

At this juncture, it is worth tackling the question of the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy again to stress that the dimension of power is included in the very presuppositions upon which it is founded. Many post-structuralists would agree with the historic narrative of Morente (1930), which seeks to analyze the process of establishing the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy, but would argue that a process such as this is essentially political (Catlaw, 2002; Keller, 1995; Latour, 1990 and 1999). For Latour (1995, p.15), the isolated, ahistorical, argument and objective existence of the external world was given to fend off the “unruly mob”, which Socrates and others were so quick to invoke to justify the search for a task force of such size as to be able to curtail the power of “*ten thousand fools*”. Latour (1999) goes further and also considers as a political project the replacement of Transcendental Ego (the mind-in-a-vat) by Society: “(...) it was now the prejudices, categories, and paradigms of a group of people living together that determined the representations of every one of those people” (1999:6).

“Nothing in the world could pass through so many intermediaries and reach the individual mind. People were now locked not only into the prison of their own categories but into that of their social groups as well. Second, this “society” itself was just a series of minds-in-a-vat, many minds and many vats to be sure, but each of them still gazing at an outside world. Some improvement! If prisoners were not longer in isolated cells, they were now confined to the same dormitory, the same collective mentality. Third, the next shift, from Ego to multiple cultures, jeopardized the only good thing about Kant, that is, the universality of the a priori categories, the only bit of ersatz absolute certainty he had been able to retain. Everyone was not locked in the same prison any more; now there were many prisons, incommensurable, unconnected. Not only was the mind disconnected from the world, but each collective mind, each culture was disconnected from the others” (Latour, 1999:15).

The political game which is present in the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy is also analyzed by Keller (1995). Emphasizing the ideological dimension of the category of the model and based on a psychoanalytical approach, the author attempts to grasp the culturally persistent association between objectivity and masculinity. She shows that this association reflects and contributes to a complex network of cognitive, emotional and sexual development. In order to see how the objectives of science – knowledge and power – are translated in terms of objectification and domination, Keller examines the psycho-dynamic roots that bring these objectives together. “*Objectivity, I argue, is the cognitive counterpart of psychological autonomy, and accordingly must be understood as rooted in interpersonal space; the capacity for objectivity develops together with the articulation of self and of gender*” (Keller, 1995:71). The relations between objectivity, power and domination are seen from the basis of an interpersonal perspective, even in non-humans.

As we saw earlier, Foucault not only acknowledges this political dimension, which is present in the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy, but also carefully conjoins the dimension of power to the analysis of discourse. The concept of power is not merely present in Foucauldian analysis. It is by means of the relations of power that the very process of discursive formation is made possible.

4. Reappraisal of some concepts

Starting from the classic perspective of institutionalization, we may reach the mistaken conclusion that everything, at least theoretically, has the potential for institutionalization. Especially when we use the notion of institution as being synonymous with "true entity" (for example, a regulatory entity in the educational field) we may be led to consider the process of institutionalization or institutional change as a conscious and simple process. In fact, only certain practices become institutionalized and the new institutionalism cannot come up with answers for this selective process.

Starting from a pragmatic premise, one would stress that the practices which are institutionalized are practices which "work", which are "good for us". Institutionalization occurs within discursive fields predominant in a given society. By proposing that the institutional processes occur within discursive fields, we are arguing that these are unconsciously serving the productivity of the power relations present in these fields. Practices which are institutionalized are practices which "work", in other words, they are practices which are necessary and useful to the exercise of power. In this work, these discourses (practices) are called *practical discourses*, in order to highlight the dimension of practicability.

Keller (1995) contributes to the philosophy of the science by merging the pragmatic and the Foucauldian conceptions in the analysis of the formation of new scientific fields. In the study of the formation of the scientific field of genetics in the USA, Keller (1995) developed an interesting theoretical body of knowledge regarding the role of language and dynamics of institutionalization. However, she not only focuses on language (particularly the role of metaphors) but also emphasizes the complex networks of influence and interaction which arise between norms, technical developments and metaphors. The force of the descriptive expressions is derived from the role of metaphors in the construction of similarity and difference, defining "familiar similarities" which form the basis that serves to categorize natural phenomena and motivates the realization of certain experiments or the elaboration of certain technical parameters. Not all metaphors are equally useful or catchy, or even equally *practical*. The effectiveness of metaphors depends upon the shared social conventions and also upon the authority conventionally granted upon those who use them, namely institutions. The socially effective metaphor of 20 years ago may not continue to be effective today, partly due to the dramatic transformations (as for example, gender) of prevailing discourses.

The effectiveness of scientific metaphors depends not only upon the available social resources but also upon the availability of technical and natural resources. Some metaphors may be cognitively and technologically more productive than others and they may also have different effects. In Keller's approach (1995) the scientific technique not only contributes, but is also produced by discourse. The traffic between metaphors and machines has transforming effects on the terms of social history or scientific techniques themselves. In this context, the human/non-human distinction does not exist (Latour, 1999) and the (trans)formative aspects of the new field depend upon discourse. Scientific objects are constituted and, at the same time, transformed, by discourse.

To sum up, it is possible to reply to the query of Powell & DiMaggio (1999:38) "*given that anything that enters into human interaction can become the basis of a shared typification, why are some typifications (the nation, the family, private property) so much more compelling than others (counties, second cousins, the commons)?*" A cognitive theory of action cannot cover all the different replies in affective and normative terms. Nonetheless, a theory of discourse may reunite the dimensions discussed in other perspectives, namely the affective, normative, cognitive and political dimensions. The presence of these typifications will depend upon how they are situated in the field of power relations of the discourses.

5. Conclusions

Although the neo-institutional approach is currently in fashion in the area of organizational studies, it presents some shortfalls in terms of possibilities for human action in organizations. Furthermore, the main contribution of this perspective is concentrated more on the analysis of institutions – seeing them as taken for granted – than on the analysis of processes of institutionalization. In this paper, we

argue that the referential basis provided by the post-structuralism of Foucault and the pragmatism of James and Rorty can contribute to strengthening the micro-basis for action of the approach and concomitantly, aid understanding of the processes of institutionalization. All the "official" representatives of institutionalism acknowledge that the processes they research do not arise in a vacuum. On the contrary, by using words such as network of organizations and matrix, they attempt to stress the complexity of processes of institutionalization. However, the problem lies in the basic presuppositions of their perspectives. By arguing that the subject-object dichotomy serves political interests and has severe practical consequences, we assume the pragmatic stance of Rorty and present Foucault's concept of discourse as an alternative for understanding the processes of institutionalization.

It is no accident that the concept of discourse is introduced as an alternative to the official currents of institutionalism. Discourse, for Foucault, overcomes the subject-object dichotomy, because it talks truth into being and thus, we would argue, adds more dynamism to the study of processes of institutionalization, including some often neglected dimensions in institutional analysis, namely normative, cognitive, affective and power dimensions. Discourse is not merely the crossroads between things and words. It does not involve a set of signals; rather it consists of practices, which systematically form the objects of which they speak. Situated beyond things and words, the concept of discourse overcomes the objectivity-subjectivity debate and opens up another space for discussion, which concentrates attention on rules of formation, on relations of power which (trans)form fields. The concept of discourse takes into consideration the complexity of institutionalization processes and contributes in terms of bases for institutional analysis – in this case, without the division based on the micro/macro dichotomy.

The concept of practicability arises as the key to the comprehension of processes of institutionalization. Introduced by American pragmatism, it is also present in the ethnomethodology of Garfinkel. However, we have opted to use this concept in the same way as Foucault uses it, incorporating the dimension of power and arguing that knowledge, in practical terms, is useful and necessary to the exercise of power. In this way, it is possible to take a step forward in understanding the selective aspects of institutionalization and grasp how these processes serve the relations of power present in discursive fields. Practices that become institutionalized in organizations are practices that "work"; in other words, practices which are both necessary and useful to relations of power.

In conclusion, we believe that the area of organizational studies would benefit by a more all-encompassing vision of the processes of institutionalization, which would include power at its core, instead of considering institutions as non-changing variables. Clegg (1989) has provided a framework for such analysis and this paper serves to elaborate what some of its philosophical foundations might be in greater detail. As we have already done in earlier works, we would stress that it is not possible to find answers if we just search for cause-effect relations, because the explanations found through causal mechanisms constitutes, in itself, a kind of discourse of power, as pointed out by moderns such as Hobbes (1650). Undoubtedly, if we take empirical research into consideration, what we need is, from a historical perspective, understand the way by which the main discourses or narratives constitute, transform and are transformed by our objects of investigation, among which organizations certainly occupy a central place. However, it is necessary to tackle this undertaking with a certain degree of humility, abandoning the search for ultimate causes to more proximate and local narratives, small stories that communicate their own sense of the mechanisms of truth at work. And in these matters, we should be bullied into causality.

6. References

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